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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2016  
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [KNNP](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FARWELL CALL ON OUTGOING ROK DEFENSE  
MINISTER YOON

REF: SEOUL 03768

Classified By: AMB. ALEXANDER VERSHBOW. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's November 22 office call on outgoing ROK Defense Minister Yoon, Kwang-ung:

-- The Ambassador thanked Yoon for his leadership, enhancement of South Korea's global role, and support for the alliance and its transformation.

-- Yoon acknowledged the importance of renewing the ROK troop dispatch to Iraq, but expressed concern a battle is looming in the National Assembly.

-- He also informed the Ambassador the ROKG will recommend dispatching 450 troops to Lebanon (a number calculated to be on par with, but not exceed, China's contribution).

-- Yoon described his successor, Kim, Jang-soo, as well-versed in security policy issues.

-- He agreed on the importance of designating a specific date for the transfer of wartime OPCON, but urged the USG to show more "leniency" on the issue.

-- Yoon announced he had signed off on 14 camp returns, but cautioned that the Ministry of Environment sought further information from USFK on the remaining camps.

-- The Ambassador thanked Yoon for his efforts to construct a training range on Jikdo, but learned weather conditions would likely delay completion until February 2007.

-- Both agreed that, in time, the ROKG could be convinced to fully endorse PSI.

-- They agreed the road ahead on Six-Party Talks would be extremely difficult. Yoon predicted the DPRK would likely oppose real progress toward peace because Kim Jong-il needed to maintain the image of the United States as the enemy in order to justify his regime.

The Ambassador was the last foreign dignitary, and only foreign ambassador, to pay a farewell call on Minister Yoon, who will be replaced by General Kim Jang-soo at an 11:00 handover ceremony on November 24 (Seoul Time). END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) On November 22, the Ambassador paid an office call on outgoing ROK Minister of National Defense Yoon, Kwang-ung. He thanked Minister Yoon for his leadership, his contribution to enhancing South Korea's global role, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his support for the alliance, and for the significant transformation that had taken place on Yoon's watch. The Ambassador commented that troop contributions by the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Iraq, Afghanistan, and perhaps soon in Lebanon as well, serve to counter the pessimism too often on display by the media. Yoon said he appreciated the Ambassador's efforts as well, during what he termed a "complicated time" in the history of the Alliance.

#### Iraq Renewal

¶3. (C) On Iraq, the Ambassador pointed out that the work of the ROK's Zaytun unit in Irbil was seen as a model by U.S. military commanders. He said he hoped the ROK troops would not be departing too soon, as there was still a need for the good work they are performing in support of reconstruction in the north. Yoon replied that President Roh faced a difficult time and would have to make a great effort to get the renewal legislation approved by the National Assembly. He told the Ambassador his ministry had taken great pains not to say anything to the media about the prospects for renewal until President Bush and President Roh had discussed the matter at their November 18 meeting in Hanoi. "The final decision will

be entirely up to our President," Yoon said.

#### UNIFIL

¶4. (C) The Ambassador cited the expected ROK decision to send troops to Lebanon as yet another example of South Korea's increasingly active role in the world. Yoon informed him that the ROK government had recently reached a coordinated inter-agency agreement to recommend to the National Assembly that the ROK send 450 troops to Lebanon. The number, he said, would be no higher than that because that was roughly the number of troops China was currently contributing to UNIFIL. It would be awkward for the ROK to send more troops than China, Yoon explained.

#### New Defense Minister

¶5. (C) Minister Yoon described his successor, Kim Jang-soo (bio information in reftel), as very familiar with security policy issues. Cryptically, Yoon said it was important to respect the fact that each individual brought a different approach to their ministerial duties. He advised the Ambassador to extend the same level of professional courtesy to Minister-designate Kim that he had shown all along. The Ambassador noted that USFK Commander General Bell had spoken highly of General Kim. He said he looked forward to having a constructive partnership with him.

#### OPCON Transfer

¶6. (C) Pointing to important work that remains to be done, the Ambassador stressed the need for both governments to designate a specific date -- within the window agreed to at the Security Consultative Meeting in October -- to get the process for transferring wartime operational control (OPCON) underway in 2007. Yoon agreed that a specific timetable must be set during the first half of 2007. He predicted there would be disagreement between the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff and USFK on the issue, but expressed optimism that over 50 years of good Alliance relations "will aid us well" to reach an agreement. "It would be very helpful for the stronger

partner (USG) to show more leniency," Yoon advised.

#### Camp Returns

¶17. (C) In response to a warning by the Ambassador that if the camp return issue continues to drag on, it could get mixed up in the 2007 Korean national election, Yoon announced that he had put his signature to 14 of the camp returns the previous day. He said he did so with a feeling of "great responsibility" and the philosophy that resolving the issue as quickly as possible was the best solution for the sake of the Alliance. Yoon cautioned that the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) sought further information from USFK on the remaining camp returns. Yoon blamed these delays on the younger generation who did not understand all the United States had done for Korea. The Ambassador replied that there was also an insufficient understanding among the broader Korean populace about the U.S.-ROK Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which provided the basis for our position on environmental issues. He pointed out that USFK is, in fact, doing more than the SOFA requires.

#### Jikdo Range

¶18. (C) The Ambassador thanked Minister Yoon for his efforts to complete the WISS (electronic scoring) installation on the Jikdo air-to-surface training range. Yoon lamented the fact that weather conditions had now slowed construction, saying he received a report the day before that the project would "realistically" not be completed until February 2007. He

said he had attended his last cabinet meeting the previous day where he had thanked Prime Minister Han Myung-sook for her valuable assistance in bringing along local authorities in both Jikdo and the relocation of Yongsan Garrison to Pyongyang.

#### PSI

¶19. (C) Noting that MND had taken a more positive view of the ROK's role in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) than some other parts of the Korean government, the Ambassador urged the ministry to continue to make the case for full participation in PSI. The political debate over that issue has been too emotional, the Ambassador commented, adding that if Korean officials focused on the facts, they would realize they could have endorsed PSI while doing only what they are already committed to do to support it. Both agreed that, in time, the ROKG could perhaps be convinced of that.

#### North Korean Nuclear Test

¶10. (C) The Ambassador similarly praised MND's strong voice against the North Korean nuclear test. He pointed out that while it appears the Six-Party Talks will resume shortly, there is no certainty the DPRK will voluntarily give up its nuclear weapons. U.S.-ROK teamwork is therefore very important, the Ambassador urged, adding he was glad President Bush and President Roh had been able to meet at APEC on November 18 to bring our approaches together. Describing the road ahead as a very difficult one, Yoon provided what he called the "simple thought" that the DPRK would in fact oppose progress toward a peace regime because Kim Jong-il used North Korean fear of the United States as a primary justification for the continuation of his own military-centered dictatorship.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador agreed the Six-Party negotiations would be a difficult journey. He pointed out that while we will seek early, concrete steps by North Korea to denuclearize, the DPRK will want to postpone having to take those steps for as long as possible. Yoon expressed the belief that peace was nonetheless possible in the long run,

as it would be the natural course of events for Kim Jong-il's hold on power to weaken over time.

Time For A Rest

¶12. (C) Minister Yoon concluded by noting the Ambassador would be the final foreign dignitary with whom he would be meeting as Defense Minister. (NOTE: His staff informed us the U.S. Ambassador was the only foreign ambassador to ask for a farewell call on Minister Yoon. END NOTE). Yoon noted the Ambassador had come to Seoul during a particularly tumultuous period of time, within South Korea as well as in the North. "You have had to do so much, I hope it hasn't affected your health," he said. The Ambassador replied that events of the past year had made it an interesting time, but that he thought the important trends were now moving in a positive direction, and that a sense of solidarity seemed to be building up between the U.S. and South Korean people. He asked Yoon what was the first thing he planned to do after handing over his responsibilities to Kim Jang-soon on November 24. "My wife and I will be going into the countryside for a rest," Yoon replied with a broad smile.

VERSHBOW